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DEPARTMENT FOR INL (JLYLE), AF/W (JHUNTER)  
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SUBJECT: SIERRA LEONE INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL  
STRATEGY REPORT

REF: STATE 97230

11. Please see the following draft of the Sierra Leone  
2009-2010 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report,  
keyed to reftel:

## 2) Summary

Sierra Leone has taken steps to combat illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and has mounted efforts against drug abuse. It has limited enforcement, treatment, and rehabilitation programs; however, corruption and a lack of resources seriously impede interdiction efforts. The 2008 seizure of over 700kg of cocaine culminated in a criminal court case that ended this year, but many believe that this demonstration of Sierra Leone's rule of law has not been a deterrent to traffickers. However, overall Sierra Leone made limited efforts to combat the drug flow in 2009, hampered by resource issues and limited operational sophistication. Sierra Leone-U.S. law enforcement coordination on the narcotics issue increased in 2009, culminating in expulsions of wanted narcotics traffickers into U.S. custody in April. This unprecedented level of cooperation has already set the tone for further collaboration and engagement in the future. Interagency coordination among Sierra Leone's law enforcement entities is a challenge, but the Joint Drug Interdiction Task Force created in 2008 is now a well-functioning group that spans agencies and interests. Sierra Leone is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention.

## 3) Status of Country

Sierra Leone is a transshipment point for illegal drugs, particularly cocaine from South America. Europe is usually the final destination, often via sub-regional neighbors such as Guinea, though recent reports indicate that direct flights from Freetown to London and Brussels are also vulnerable. Lungi International Airport in Freetown is one focus for traffickers, though reports indicate that small, unmarked air strips throughout the country are also used. Narcotics primarily move overland or via sea to Guinea, with Konakridie near Port Loko as the usual port of exit. South American cocaine trafficking rings are increasingly active in Sierra Leone, relying somewhat on local partners with political and military connections. Trafficking has also fueled increasing domestic drug consumption. Cannabis cultivation is on the rise in Sierra Leone and used regularly here. Law enforcement officials are concerned that narcotics rings are growing in size and influence. Major drug traffickers pay local accomplices in kind, and Freetown now has a "street price" of 40,000 Leones (USD 10.00) for a gram of cocaine. Diversion of precursor chemicals is not a problem.

## 4) Country Actions Against Drugs in 2009

a) Policy Initiatives: The National Drug Control Act was

passed in 2008 to bring Sierra Leone into conformity with international conventions and norms. The Act expands on the Dangerous Drugs Act (1960) and the Pharmacy and Drugs Act (2001), which had major substantive drafting problems and inadequate punishment for narcotics abuse and trafficking. The 2008 Act established a National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) to serve as the focal point on policy issues and investigations. The new law also defined stricter penalties for all charges, contained mutual legal assistance provisions, and authorized a budget appropriation to support prevention and control activities. While the new Act was a positive step for Sierra Leone, harmonizing its legislation with international standards, many authorities have noted that revisions are required to increase its effectiveness. Offenses by legal persons, i.e., corporations and provisions for complicit or insufficiently responsible commercial carriers, and in addition the sections on forfeiture and foreign assets have been identified as areas needing either new or strengthened drafting. The Act also fails to adequately address prevention measures and treatment options for addicted drug abusers. The law will likely be revised in 2010, following the conclusion of the appeals process for individuals convicted under the Act in 2009.

-- The NDLEA has a limited budget and staff. Sixty officers have been seconded from the Sierra Leone Police, but lack equipment and support to effectively perform their duties. The Agency has offices in five locations outside of Freetown, but they are not yet operational. The Agency intends to increase its efforts in the area of demand reduction and public awareness.

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-- Government of Sierra Leone representatives participate in ECOWAS conferences and Mano River Union meetings, striving for better sub-regional cooperation. Law enforcement agencies cooperate with their counterparts in neighboring countries on specific cases and identifying trends.

b) Law Enforcement Efforts: Sierra Leone law enforcement agencies cooperated to combat narcotics trafficking through the Joint Drug Interdiction Task Force, which was established in 2008. The Task Force includes representatives from the SLP, Office of National Security (ONS), NDLEA, Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces, Immigration, Civil Aviation Authority, Anti-Corruption Commission, and the National Revenue Authority. The 2008 cocaine bust is counted as the Task Force's main success to date, and a significant one. The Task Force performed with distinction during this high profile incident, and has continued to expand and increase in sophistication in 2009. Thanks to significant training efforts supported by international partners, the Task Force consists of 60 enforcement officers, including surveillance and forensic specialists. The Task Force is now a pro-active unit which generates and shares intelligence, conducts large-scale operations, and responds quickly to emergent threats. It will continue to be the primary government body responsible for narcotics-related crimes until the new National Drug Law Enforcement Agency becomes fully operational.

-- Drugs transit in and out of Sierra Leone by sea, but authorities have limited means to combat this. The Joint Maritime Wing, composed of military and police officials, conduct minimal patrols with two small vessels provided by the U.S. Coast Guard and a larger, Shanghai-class patrol boat donated by the Chinese Government. The expense of fuel and maintenance is an impediment to the Wing's effectiveness, as is the short-range nature of the patrol boats available to them. The Chinese-built boat, despite its longer range, has a shallow draft and is unsuitable for deep water operations.

-- The Government of Sierra Leone is working to improve the regularity and reliability of statistics maintained on arrest rates, prosecutions, and convictions. Data kept by the SLP

between January and October, 2008, recorded seventeen seizures of cannabis and cocaine, netting approximately 10,602 kg of the former, and 743.5 kg of the latter. Twenty-one people were charged with various offenses surrounding the 2008 case, and 17 faced narcotics charges in the High Court. Fifteen individuals were ultimately convicted, with custodial sentences ranging from three to five years. There were no narcotics-related extraditions to or from the United States in 2009.

c) Corruption: Sierra Leone does not, as a matter of government policy, encourage or facilitate illicit production or distribution of narcotic or psychotropic drugs or other controlled substances, or the laundering of proceeds from illegal drug transactions, nor has any senior official been charged with engaging in, encouraging, or facilitating narcotics production or trafficking. However, Sierra Leone's judicial system is still undergoing a rebuilding process, and struggles with low conviction rates across a spectrum of crimes, including those that are narcotics-related. Even those violators who are convicted often pay a fine in lieu of serving prison time, though the new National Drug Control Act has stiffer penalties and requisite jail terms. The limited resources available to the judiciary remain a problem in controlling drug trafficking in Sierra Leone.

-- Corruption among law enforcement officials is also a problem in Sierra Leone due to the low levels of pay and general endemic poverty. Two SLP officers and one ONS officer were convicted for their role in the July 2008 cocaine bust.

d) Agreements and Treaties: Sierra Leone is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention, the 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances, and the 1961 UN Single Convention, as amended by the 1972 Protocol. U.S.-Sierra Leone extradition relations are governed by the 1974 Extradition Act. Sierra Leone is a party to the UN Convention against Corruption. In March 2008, Sierra Leone ratified the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption, five years after they became signatories. Though Sierra Leone signed the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime in 2001, it has yet to ratify it.

e) Cultivation and Production: Cannabis is widely cultivated and consumed locally, and is also transported to surrounding countries and Europe. The Joint Drug Interdiction Task Force

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conducted multiple raids of cannabis farms, and noted that cultivation appears to be increasing; the government is concerned that cannabis production is crowding-out regular subsistence farming, and is a threat to food security. One & joint 8 costs approximately 1,000 Leones, (25 U.S. cents) on the streets of Freetown.

f) Drug Flow/Transit: Cocaine is the main drug that transits Sierra Leone. Cocaine comes from South America en route to Europe. Sierra Leone's unguarded and porous maritime border makes it highly vulnerable to traffickers moving shipments by sea. Narcotics are often held and repackaged in Sierra Leone for reshipment to Guinea, though some go directly to Europe via shipping containers or in air cargo. Individuals also carry small amounts on passenger aircraft, sometimes in their baggage or items with hidden compartments, and through body cavity concealment. In October, a Nigerian citizen was stopped with 12 balloons of cocaine in his stomach; authorities believe that this practice is increasing in Sierra Leone.

-- Improving security at Lungi Airport has been a priority for authorities and the international airlines that use it, and luggage is scanned for contraband. Individuals are also searched, as well as hand-luggage searches, resulting in most of the arrests at the airport to date. Still, officials assume that the drugs found are only a small portion of what

slips through the cracks due to imperfect detection efforts and corruption.

g) Domestic Programs: The NDLEA, in conjunction with civil society, has conducted several public awareness campaigns about the dangers of drugs. This includes outreach to schools and over radio, and the publication of posters and pamphlets. The Agency intends to increase these efforts in 2009. Treatment programs are highly limited, with addicts receiving assistance at the country's one psychiatric hospital and a few private facilities run by NGOs. The 2008 law puts treatment and rehabilitation for offenders under the purview of the Minister of Justice and appointed treatment assessment panels. Treatment can be in lieu of prosecution, or result in a sentence suspension, to be determined on a case-by-case basis. Funding for treatment and facilities will be provided by the Sierra Leone Fund for Prevention and Control of Drug Abuse, which will include funds from Parliament, moneys provided through mutual assistance agreements, voluntary payments, grants, or gifts, and investment income derived from the Fund. The Fund will also be used to support the Agency's overall efforts.

#### 5) U.S. Policy Initiatives and Programs

a) Bilateral Cooperation: The USG's counternarcotics and anticrime goals in Sierra Leone are to strengthen Sierra Leonean law enforcement capacity generally, improve interdiction capabilities, and reduce Sierra Leone's role as a transit point for narcotics. In 2008, Sierra Leone became eligible for ILEA-U.S. Law Enforcement Academy training, and officers have started attending courses. Narcotics-specific training, as well as related training, was prioritized in 2009; the JDITF and others benefited from several USG-sponsored events, including surveillance training and investigation techniques for transnational organized crime cases.

-- In April, 2009, Sierra Leone expelled three foreign nationals into U.S. custody. These individuals, who were prosecuted in Sierra Leone for their role in the 2008 cocaine bust, were removed to the United States to face charges there and assist with significant ongoing investigations. Though there is no overarching bilateral mutual legal assistance treaty between Sierra Leone and the U.S., eight months of negotiation and collaboration paved the way for a successful expulsion by the authority of Sierra Leonean law. The expulsion sent a powerful message that Sierra Leone is an active and cooperative partner in the global war on drugs, using both their own domestic legal framework and their positive relationships with other nations to bring criminals to justice.

b) The Road Ahead: The April conviction of 15 traffickers, including 7 foreigners, strongly indicated that Sierra Leone is trying to stem the tide of organized crime that is infiltrating the sub-region. Ongoing efforts to train and mobilize the enforcement group, as well as willingness to collaborate with international partners, also demonstrate Sierra Leone's tough stance on drugs. However, having a will does not necessarily mean that there is a way ) limited funding to effectively enforce the 2008 law remains a

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significant problem. Enhancing law enforcement's capacity to combat the drug trade through training and equipment and reducing corruption within the ranks require funds the Sierra Leonean government simply does not have. Enforcing strict controls over financial transactions, to prevent funds earned from the narcotics trade being used for further criminal activity, is also an unaffordable necessity for Sierra Leone. Strengthening law enforcement capabilities, enhancing security measures at the airport, and improving surveillance of the ports and waterways are important priorities that the government can ill-afford to ignore if it seeks to prevent Sierra Leone from becoming an even more attractive target for

criminal organizations.  
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